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ABSTRACT

The monograph, written for persons and organizations at state and local levels who share concern about learning activities for adults in rural America, explores characteristics of three traditional providers of nonformal education (the Cooperative Extension Service, public libraries, and community service divisions of community colleges), assesses their responsiveness to rural adult needs, and notes benefits of rural free universities. Four criteria are used to assess responsiveness of these programs: active user engagement, pluralism, affirmation of rural values and culture, and a stable institutional base with access to learning resource tools. Evaluation indicates that the three traditional providers have strong institutional stability but do not effectively meet the other three criteria. The rural free university, based on the assumption that anyone can teach and anyone can learn, is assessed as being effective in the other three criteria, but with a weak institutional base. The rural free university model and its success in Kansas are described. Integration of the rural free university model into central operations of the Cooperative Extension Service, public libraries, and community service divisions in community college is suggested as being of great potential benefit to thousands of rural Americans, while greatly enhancing public perception and support for these institutions. (Author/MH)

TRADITIONAL PROVIDERS OF NONFORMAL ADULT EDUCATION

Three major institutions are commonly perceived as community learning centers in rural America: the

adult education in rural america

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county agents. Specialists serve as the interpretive link between teaching and research at the university level and teaching at the local level. Programs are transmitted locally through the 4,000 agricultural and 4,000 home economics county agents who live and work

in Rural America:
The Rural Free University
and Three Traditional Providers

by

Jim Killacky

University of Maine-Orono

March 1984

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The first and still seminal criticism of the CES
appeared in 1973 with the publication of Hard
Tomatoes, Hard Times (Hightower, 1973), which argued:

Like the other parts of the landgrant

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lack of services in general and to a lack of adult education focus in particular. Degruyter (1980) suggested a five-fold period of development in rural libraries:

1. library extension in the 1890s when

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debate notwithstanding, the most obvious trend in public libraries has been that adult education activities tended to prosper with the presence of outside funding. This was especially the case in the 1930s and again in the 1960s. There is little evidence, however, that could lead one to conclude

. . . is the commitment to a set of values and to a system of education that affords all members the opportunity to stretch their minds to full capacity, from early childhood through adulthood, learning more as the world itself changes. (p. 13)

The report further asserts that education is important not only because of what it contributes to one's career goals but also because of the value it adds to the general quality of one's life. Educational opportunities in the Learning Society are seen as extending far beyond traditional institutions of learning and continuing as a life-long process.

Commitments to providing educational services to rural America, however, have a hit-or-miss history. Some services have been nonexistent, or based on urban models, or have not been implemented in ways that built on strengths of the rural environment. How, then, can the Learning Society and life-long learning opportunities be made real for rural America?

This monograph by Jim Killacky, Director of Upward Bound and Talent Search programs at the University of Maine, explores characteristics of three traditional providers of nonformal education and assesses their responsiveness to rural adult needs. Dr. Killacky draws on his extensive experience with the rural free university model to provide insights and suggestions for integrating the model with the three traditional service providers.

The monograph is written for persons and organizations at state and local levels who share a concern about learning opportunities for adults in

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between adult educators and librarians and called loudly for remedial action. In a much tougher and more pragmatic stance Birge (1981) wrote:

After years of quiet supportive contributions to adult education, the library once

lives.
Betty Rose D. Rios
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Cohen & Brawer (1982) provided the most succinct overview of these developments. Participants tended to have short-term goals not related to degrees or certification and were usually older than college students. The broad scope of activities included adult education, adult basic education, continuing

rural adults remain unserved. Nonformal adult education is an effective way to facilitate rural people's entry to and participation in the learning society.

Four criteria can be used to assess the responsiveness of nonformal adult education programs: active user engagement, pluralism, affirmation of rural values and culture, and a stable institutional base with access to learning resource tools. The three traditional institutional providers of rural nonformal adult education, the Cooperative Extension Service, public libraries, and community service divisions of community colleges, are strong providers in terms of institutional stability but do not effectively meet the other three criteria. The rural free university is effective in active user engagement, pluralism, and affirmation of rural values and culture but has a very weak institutional base. The rural free university, based on the assumption that anyone can teach and anyone can learn, has been widely developed in Kansas and other rural areas.

Integration of the rural free university model into central operations of the Cooperative Extension Service, public libraries, and community service divisions in community colleges could be of enormous benefit to thousands of rural Americans while greatly enhancing public perception and support for each of these institutions.

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educational functions into a complex sufficient to respond to the population's learning needs" (1980, p. 10).

The rural community college literature, represented by Hamrich (1970), Vaughn (1976), Grymes

that in past decades public policy decisions tended to favor urban rather than rural needs. In an effort to balance the scales, the Secretary noted, "It is appropriate that we strengthen our efforts to provide programs that address the educational needs of rural and small town youth and adults" (Bell, 1983, p. 1). In a similar fashion, another leading educational authority (Cross, 1981) wrote:

Lifelong learning is no longer a privilege or a right; it is simply a necessity for anyone young or old who must live with the escalating pace of change . . . in the family, on the job in the community and in the worldwide society. (p. ix)

This paper is designed to inform and stimulate persons and organizations whose major concern is adult learning in rural areas. Decision makers and policy makers in state departments of adult education, state or county extension offices, public libraries, community colleges, or concerned citizens or members of community organizations that seek to tap community learning resources will find the information presented here of value in program development and implementation.

The growing need for adult learning opportunities in rural areas can be met by utilizing the rural free university model of learning, and it is proposed that traditional providers of nonformal adult education in rural America, including the Cooperative Extension Service, public libraries, and the community service divisions of community colleges, adopt this model as a central part of their operations.

The rural free university model and its definition of nonformal adult education have been

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THE RURAL FREE UNIVERSITY MODEL

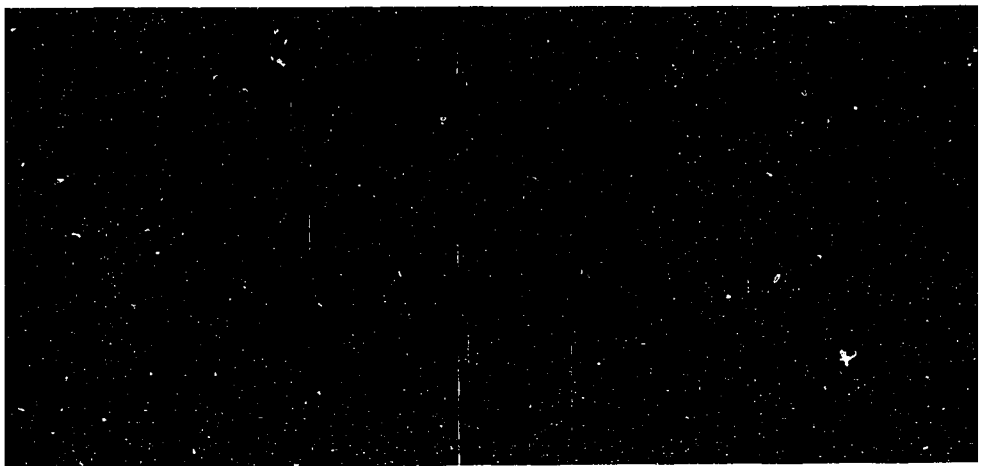
The rural free university model is based on the notion that anyone can teach and anyone can learn; therefore, everyone in the community is both a

courses to the general public; in the free university anyone can learn, and anyone can teach. That definition encompasses nonformal adult education as it is used in this paper. What can this model do for an individual, a program, a state, or a community? The answer is comprised of the following points:

1. It demystifies learning.
2. It creates new interests and taps heretofore unrecognized community resources.
3. It provides informal and cost-efficient learning opportunities; there are no grades, and leaders are volunteers.
4. It keeps old skills alive and thriving.
5. It provides an easy forum for non-threatening attention to taboo subjects: alcoholism, spouse abuse, single parenting, and a range of mental health issues.
6. It helps address the critical issue of rural isolation and the nothing-to-do syndrome.
7. It provides an entree for newcomers to a community and the opportunity for the emergence of new leadership.
8. It allows participants to cross social, economic, and cultural barriers.
9. It is a means of fostering adult development, especially in rural women whose child-rearing days are over and who wish to turn to new pursuits.

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taped, extensive notes were taken, and it was discovered in this activity that Olsburg's centennial was in 1980. A book based on the findings in the history course was written and published. In June 1980 over 5,000 people showed up - including the

11. It provides new clientele for the organizational sponsors of the program: the Cooperative Extension Service, public libraries, and community colleges.

12. It opens the doors of learning to a population not usually disposed in that direction and thus creates an awareness of the potential to be had from more formal academic pursuits.

Can the free university really deliver on this large list of promises? The list is not derived from sheer faith or from a dream. Rather, it grows from the actual experience of the model's application in rural areas of Kansas and other states beginning in 1975. However, if the model is to be successfully applied on a broad basis throughout rural areas, then the most effective way will be through its integration into already existing institutional providers of adult education. While the noted institutional providers are not doing all they can to meet nonformal adult learning needs in rural areas, they are in an excellent position to integrate the rural free university model and thus to respond much more effectively to the growing educational, cultural, and social needs of rural Americans.¹



The rural free university model is community learning at the grassroots level. It represents a substantial step towards concepts of education that are learner-centered, that promote lifelong sharing of skills and knowledge, that support community and organizational cooperation, that develop human

this trend reversed in the 1970s. Using data from the 1980 census, Margolis (1981) pointed out that 27 percent of the population is rural. Numbering 61 million, this represents a net gain in rural population of more than 4 million since 1970. A second and related trend is the change in numerical domination of young people in this country. The effects of the post-World War II baby boom and the subsequent baby bust are such that by the end of this century the nation will be dominated by those in middle years. By the year 2000 the largest group will be 30- to 44-year olds, with a rising curve for those aged 45 to 60 (Cross, 1981). In the late 1960s and 1970s the baby boom generation brought increases in college and university enrollments and planted educational seeds that were harvested not only in pursuit of traditional degree work, but also through increasing participation in adult education. Cross (1981) presented data showing that between 1967-1968 and 1974-1975 registration in noncredit adult education courses in institutions of higher education increased by 57 percent. Between 1975 and 1981 rural participants in adult education grew from 4.3 million to 5.8 million (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1982).

While there are vast regional differences in rural learning needs, a fairly constant consideration is the wide dispersion of rural populations over great geographic distances. "Technological advancements, recertification requirements, unemployment, and the proliferation of knowledge have made it just as important for rural adults to seek further learning" (McCannon, 1983, p. 2). Other social changes which necessitate wider learning opportunities are increased leisure time, changing roles for women, and, most importantly, the requirements for equal opportunity and access to learning activities. The few studies on

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and responsive programs. Furthermore, all programs which have concluded the state funding cycle continue to operate under local auspices.³

The Model and the Criteria

the interests of rural learners suggest that activities have tended more towards personal and self-development than towards vocational and formal continuing education. McCannon (1983) reviewed the small number of works which deal with barriers to rural adult learners and concluded:

There seems to be a general consensus that rural adult learners do experience significant barriers, foremost are distances, lack of prior educational attainment and available counseling services; lack of family support and financial assistance are also barriers that rural learners face. (p. 7)

Addressing the problem of adult education in rural America, Cross (1981a) stated:

Rural Americans are among the most educationally disadvantaged of all population subgroups, participating in organized instruction at about half the rate of the average American. Worse yet, because many people living in remote areas are older and have lower levels of formal schooling, the handicaps to further education pile up and there is very little chance that older people with low levels of educational attainment will be participating in the learning society without the intervention of educators who provide "low-threat" learning opportunities. (p. 17)

Criteria for Responsive Programs

Four criteria for assessing the responsiveness of nonformal rural adult education programs have been derived from direct experience in rural America and from a growing body of literature which calls for changes in approaches to adult education (e.g., Knowles, 1980; Draves, 1981; Gross, 1977; Tough, 1971; & McCannon, 1983). These four criteria are:

1. Active User Engagement. This refers to genuine responsiveness to actual learning needs of the participants and to their active participation in planning events. Too often programs are designed by "experts" who have not consulted the population to be served and who are geared to meeting institutional rather than than participant needs.

2. Pluralism. This refers to the have/have-not issue. Typically, participants in nonformal adult education programs are those who already have considerable backgrounds and qualifications in education; such programs leave the poor and under-educated even further behind. Programs designed to tackle this issue head-on must reach audiences beyond those typically attracted to adult education.

3. Affirmation of Rural Values and Culture. This criterion is inextricably linked with issues of isolation and leisure time. Increasing leisure time and isolation of rural areas from traditional centers of culture and learning necessitate programs which emphasize, celebrate, and develop local learning resources and which provide people with a sense of pride in their surroundings and an affirmation of their choice to live and work in rural areas.

4. Stable Institutional Bases with Access to Learning Resource Tools. This criterion is vital. Any review of learning innovations will show that they flourish in times of plenty and regress in times of retrenchment. These conditions are exacerbated in rural areas. However, rural America must not be ignored if its residents are to participate actively in the current, pervasive technological revolution. Nonformal adult education programs will not facilitate such participation without a stable institutional base which can weather the fiscal uncertainties to which nonformal programs are so often susceptible.

TRADITIONAL PROVIDERS OF NONFORMAL ADULT EDUCATION

Three major institutions are commonly perceived as community learning centers in rural America: the Cooperative Extension Service, community services in community colleges, and public libraries.² These institutions are very effective in terms of their stability and their access to learning resource tools. However, such institutions are not very effective in terms of active user engagement, pluralism, and affirmation of rural values and culture. The rural free university, on the other hand, is found to be strong in terms of these three criteria but weak in institutional stability. Consequently, integration of the rural free university model by these three institutions will be a substantial step in the direction of meeting the nonnormal learning needs of adults in rural areas.

The Cooperative Extension Service

The Cooperative Extension Service (CES) is the largest adult education organization in the world (Knowles, 1977). At the national level it is a division of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). At the state level it is a division of the land-grant university, and at the local level it operates from the County Extension Office. Since its federal inauguration by the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, the fundamental goal of the CES has been transmission of practical knowledge to the people of the United States. This knowledge is generated primarily through the research and teaching functions of the land-grant universities.

The CES currently operates in some 3,150 counties in the United States and its territories. Its program areas are in agriculture, natural resources and environment, home economics, community development, and the 4-H youth program. Its staff, consisting of some 18,000 members nationwide, is comprised of administrators and supervisors, state specialists, and

county agents. Specialists serve as the interpretive link between teaching and research at the university level and teaching at the local level. Programs are transmitted locally through the 4,000 agricultural and 4,000 home economics county agents who live and work with the people at the county level. These county agents provide assistance through meetings, short courses, demonstrations, workshops, publications, and mass media. Programs sponsored by the CES cover a wide range of topics with a primary emphasis on education for increased efficiency in agricultural production and marketing; other topics follow in decreasing priority. Matthews (1960) provided this useful summary of the methods and contributions of the CES to adult education:

1. During World War I, the Depression, and World War II, the CES dealt effectively with disastrous situations because of the extensive formal and informal complex source networks established by service workers.

2. The CES has effectively taught its staff to present information simply.

3. The CES has had a major role, through adult education, in fostering farmers' productivity.

4. The CES has fostered the involvement of learners--a basic principle of effective program building.

5. The CES has pioneered in the demonstration method of teaching, in the production of varied learning materials (especially visual aids), and in the use of the media.

6. Through educational research and evaluation, the CES has made more substantial contributions to new knowledge and methods than has any other educational agency.

The first and still seminal criticism of the CES appeared in 1973 with the publication of Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times (Hightower, 1973), which argued:

Like the other parts of the landgrant complex, extension has been preoccupied with efficiency and production, a focus that has contributed much to the largest producers, but has also slighted the pressing needs of the vast majority of America's farmers, and ignored the great majority of other rural people. . . . There were six million farms in 1945; by 1971 the number had plummeted to 2.9 million--a "fallout" of half the farmers in the country. During the same 26-year period, extension's annual budget skyrocketed from \$38 million to \$332 million--a 900 percent increase. (p. 120)

Hightower's work opened a gate through which many others have followed, and today within the CES considerable effort is being devoted to assessing its mission and charting new directions for the future. Most recently, a blue-ribbon commission appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture completed a major study entitled Extension in the 80's and, among other things, called for: the development and demonstration of new educational methodologies; delivery systems, materials, and programs that have regional and national application; and involvement of greater numbers of volunteers in CES programs (United States Department of Agriculture-National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges USDA-NASULGC, 1983).

Public Libraries

Although the public library dates from the middle of the last century, it was not until the mid-1920s that the relationship between adult education and the public library made an appearance on the national educational agenda. The small body of literature concerning rural libraries points largely to a severe

lack of services in general and to a lack of adult education focus in particular. Degruyter (1980) suggested a five-fold period of development in rural libraries:

1. Library extension in the 1890s when traveling libraries began to be operated by state library agencies.

2. The introduction of county librarians during World War I and in the 1920s with local governments responsible for providing library service through an adequate tax base.

3. The introduction of cooperative and regional services during the 1940s and 1950s.

4. Passage of the Library Service Act of 1956 and the Library Service and Construction Act of 1964 which provided substantial federal funding for the development of basic library services and facilities in rural areas.

Lee (1966) and others have proposed a framework of public library operations which falls into five major activities:

1. To collect, preserve, and circulate books.

2. To make books readily accessible.

3. To cooperate with and to supplement the work of other educational agencies.

4. To provide the type of educational service the library is best qualified to offer.

5. To become the major agency of adult education in the community.

The literature reflects general agreement on the first three of these points while the latter two are the subject of vigorous debate and disagreement. This

debate notwithstanding, the most obvious trend in public libraries has been that adult education activities tended to prosper with the presence of outside funding. This was especially the case in the 1930s and again in the 1960s. There is little evidence, however, that could lead one to conclude that adult education is generally perceived to be a central function of the public library, whether rural or urban.

In rural areas McCallum (1980) cited limitations in staff and meeting space as posing programming problems and noted the absence of adult education training in library school curricula. She provided, however, several examples of projects funded through the National Endowment for the Humanities which usually have involved academic humanists in group discussions with local people on issues of public policy. Other programs involved training of library staff in humanities programming and evaluations, and promoting historical projects through the oral tradition, photography, and museum displays which have tended to make some libraries more than book depositories. She also noted an Appalachian traveling bookstore project which provides the region with books and other cultural artifacts and described a number of rural free university programs in Kansas and Oklahoma which have operated out of public libraries.

If one stopped here, there could be a residue of pessimism about an active adult education role for public libraries. However, attempts to provide rural adult learning opportunities will be less than adequate without the full utilization of the resources which can be generated through public libraries. A report of the 1980 Adult Education Association/USA task force on libraries and adult education stated that the "library is a major resource through its support of other educational institutions, its own programming and its interest and ability to meet the needs of independent learners" (AEA/USA, 1980, p. 1). The report went on to note there was little linkage

between adult educators and librarians and called loudly for remedial action. In a much tougher and more pragmatic stance Birge (1981) wrote:

After years of quiet supportive contributions to adult education, the library once again has the opportunity to become an active learning center with the support and encouragement of a wide variety of non-traditional educational agencies. The public library has been invited to join educators in exploring the possibilities of providing educational assistance for individuals of every need and interest. If the profession declines that invitation, the chance for bringing the library to the forefront of community consciousness may be lost. It seems unlikely, in these days of decreasing revenues, that a public institution which does not serve the community to the fullest extent of its human and material resources will long be able to justify continued community and financial support. (p. 135)

Community Services in Community Colleges

Although adult education, in the form of evening offerings of daytime courses, was a part of the community college movement since its inception early in this century, it was not until the 1950s that separate divisions of community services came into existence. Most nonformal adult education activities which from the mid-1950s on went far beyond evening credit courses, fall within these divisions. These divisions, like the colleges, experienced spectacular growth in numbers between 1955 and the present. Participation in 1955 was 263,305 (Reynolds, 1956) but by the late 1970s an estimated 3.4 million people annually engaged in community service activities (Cohen, 1981).

Cohen & Brawer (1982) provided the most succinct overview of these developments. Participants tended to have short-term goals not related to degrees or certification and were usually older than college students. The broad scope of activities included adult education, adult basic education, continuing education, community services, and community-based education. Sources of funding included participant fees, institutional support, and state and federal grants and allocations. Cohen & Brawer (1982) demonstrate how the relatively comfortable fiscal picture, particularly in terms of public support, has recently changed drastically:

The precarious base of funding for community education was revealed during the 1979-81 period when tax-limitation legislation was passed in several states and a national administration pledged to reduce taxes was elected. Soon after the 1978 passage of Proposition 13 in California, the average community services budget was cut by at least 50 per cent. These cuts resulted in a 70 per cent increase in courses for which fees were charged and a 24 per cent decrease in courses funded through college budgets. (p. 271)

These authors, who are major figures in the community college field, paint a gloomy picture for the future in this area and essentially argue that the major mission of the community college should revert to a general liberal education. Others (e.g., Brenneman & Nelson, 1981) recommend that community services be strictly on a pay-as-you-go basis.

The writings of Edmund Gleazer (1968, 1980), recently retired head of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, have long and consistently argued the other side of the debate. Gleazer sees the future of the community college and its service function as the "nexus of a community learning system relating organizations with

educational functions into a complex sufficient to respond to the population's learning needs" (1980, p. 10).

The rural community college literature, represented by Hamrich (1970), Vaughn (1976), Grymes (1976) and others, reflects the view that the shortage of facilities in rural communities propels the local community college into a role that ought to fill a major void in its service area both in traditional services and in other areas such as nonformal adult education. However, the lack of fiscal support, the absence of a clearly defined mission, rural isolation, and the costs of traditional methods of providing outreach services--along with a frequently held notion of community colleges having to try to be "little Harvards"--lead one to conclude that this "major void" in terms of nonformal adult education is still a long way from being filled. The integration of the rural free university model of learning may play a substantial role in clearing up this discrepancy while at the same time serving adult learning needs and establishing much greater visibility and credibility for the community college.

THE RURAL FREE UNIVERSITY MODEL

The rural free university model is based on the notion that anyone can teach and anyone can learn; therefore, everyone in the community is both a potential teacher and a potential learner. Free universities offer ungraded, noncredit courses to the community. The model, developed through the efforts of the University for Man (UFM) at Kansas State University, got its start in 1975. UFM received grants from The Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education and ACTION which enabled a statewide development of a network of rural free university programs. These vignettes, related by Killacky & Maes (1979) and Killacky (1981), provide a rich flavor of what took place:

In the small western Kansas town of Dighton, there is a twelve year old deaf girl who communicates solely by sign language. Her next door neighbor is a 70 year old woman who became increasingly frustrated at her inability to communicate with the young girl. The older lady called the local free university and asked if a course on sign language could be arranged. This was done, and the course was led by the girl and her parents. 18 people enrolled including the neighbor lady, future teachers of the girl and several of her school and church chums. The older lady asserted that without the free university this never would have happened.

In Olsburg, Kansas, - population 169 - the local free university in 1978 offered a course on the History of Olsburg. 57 people signed up, came and listened avidly as a panel of 5 convenors-- all over 80 years of age, took the audience on a spellbinding oral history journey which soon extended to additional meetings. The sessions were

taped, extensive notes were taken, and it was discovered in this activity that Olsburg's centennial was in 1980. A book based on the findings in the history course was written and published. In June 1980 over 5,000 people showed up - including the Governor of the State - to celebrate the most remarkable weekend in the town's history. The budget for the entire celebration was \$17.25.

A course was offered in another small town on the Czech language and 65 people signed up. One of the "students" had two years earlier instructed the "teacher" in English. Now the form was being returned.

The conceptual framework which guides the free university model's development seeks to provide the means for people to take control of their own lives, to recognize their potential as teachers and learners, and to become, in the process, less dependent on outside resources and experts over which one has little control. This concern was eloquently expressed by Coates & Coates (1981), two UFM staff members:

If we are once again to have a meaningful politics of place, mechanisms must be found for people within the local community to share their concerns, their knowledge and their lives. Like the Greek notion of *padeia*, education must be thought of as a primary function of membership in the community rather than the consumption of certified commodities acquired through submission to bureaucratic processes in specialized institutions. The community itself must become the setting for a life-long process of self-transformation through the pursuit of the greatest good for the greatest number. Life and learning must once again become a unified whole. (p. 77)

The rural free university model is community learning at the grassroots level. It represents a substantial step towards concepts of education that are learner-centered, that promote lifelong sharing of skills and knowledge, that support community and organizational cooperation, that develop human networks, and that provide more equal access to the tools of science and technology.

More than 50 programs of rural free university education have been started in Kansas, and the model has been expanded through a public library system in Oklahoma and through the Cooperative Extension Service in Kentucky. In Kansas, more than 35,000 participants per year join in free university activities at an annual per capita cost of less than \$8 (Killacky, 1984). In Manhattan, Kansas, where UFM is located, some 900 courses are offered each year and engage some 12,000 participants. Course leaders are all volunteers; there are no credits or exams. In 1981, UFM began charging a \$3 registration fee to non-KSU students and began selling advertising space in brochures. The organization has spawned a food co-operative and an evening child care center, runs a major appropriate technology program with the Kansas State University College of Architecture, and provides a number of graduate and undergraduate internships and field placements in several academic disciplines.

One substantive measure of the validity of the rural free university model may be seen in action taken by the Kansas legislature. In order to get off the federal fiscal bandwagon, UFM proposed legislation that would make state funds available to communities that wished to start a free university project. The funds would be available on a 3-year sliding-scale, matching basis. In an unprecedented action, the legislature in the 1979 session took only 10 weeks to pass and appropriate a small amount of funding (\$40,000) for the Community Resource Act. Since 1980, more than 36 projects statewide have been funded an average amount of \$1,300. This demonstrates that one does not need large amounts of money to have effective

and responsive programs. Furthermore, all programs which have concluded the state funding cycle continue to operate under local auspices.³

The Model and the Criteria

Because it is locally controlled and operated, the rural free university model must engage its participants in the learning process. Such active user engagement is clearly evident in the assorted variety of courses that have been offered in each community.⁴ Courses are generated by local people, usually a coordinator and an advisory board, in response to what citizens express as learning needs. In many cases the leaders or convenors of these events have not been experts in the traditional sense, but have taken advantage of the learner-centered model to actively engage people with similar interests. The results have been learning networks which highlight local resources and which demonstrate the capability to awaken individuals and groups to the reservoirs of untapped skills, knowledge, and resources which exist within the community itself.

The model responds positively to bridging the have/have-not gap in terms of participation. This contention is clearly supported in a study designed to examine the meaning of these programs for participants and their communities.⁵ Respondents said that through participation in these programs they met and interacted with people of different social, economic, and cultural levels with whom they otherwise would not have had contact.

The rural free university model responds positively to the important criterion of affirming rural values and culture. Participants repeatedly and consistently reported that the free university had become a vital element in dealing with the reality of rural isolation. It provided an opportunity to meet with friends and neighbors and become acquainted with new people in an innovative learning atmosphere which otherwise did not exist. At community levels the

model helped focus efforts to undertake major projects not otherwise possible. Included here are the centennial celebration in Olsburg, a wide range of arts and crafts fairs, the establishment of a now-thriving community orchestra, and a number of technology collectives. The model was also cited as being instrumental in the decision of several professionals (particularly in the health fields) to take up residence in rural communities and to make their services locally available.

The rural free university model is weakest in its lack of a stable institutional base and access to learning resource tools. While UFM has helped spawn the model in Kansas, it does not have the institutional capability to do so nationally. A small grassroots organization, UFM is largely dependent on outside sources of support ("soft money"). In these times of fiscal restraints, the resources to mount a national dissemination model are not available to the organization. The model is also weak with respect to accessing learning resource tools. Even though its boundless resource lies in its volunteers, and while annual budgets are averaging only \$2,500, a rural free university simply cannot afford the technological tools (such as microcomputers) which are vital if adult education programs are to meet learning needs in the gathering momentum of the present technological revolution. However, these tools are accessible through the more traditional institutional providers: the CBS, community services in community colleges, and public libraries.

Integration of the Rural Model

There are seven steps involved in getting the rural free university model up and running.⁶ These steps are fundamental and apply whether the model is being run by one of the proposed institutions or several:

1. The Starting Point. To begin, it is necessary to identify one or more individuals in a community who would like a project, to meet and explain the process to them, and to have them call a meeting of as many interested people as possible. At this meeting the free university concept and its application to this community are explained. Assuming positive response, after this meeting a core group of people who want to be involved with the project should address issues such as who will sponsor the project, where it will be located, who will constitute the Advisory Board (Steering Committee, Board of Directors, etc.), and what is needed for start up funding and who will provide it.⁷

. The Advisory Board. Such a board should be as representative of the group to be served as possible and should include some community leaders. The board should number between 8 and 12 people. Experience has shown that having a board whose full attention is devoted to the project is critical. Operating under the aegis of existing (and often over-worked) structures such as library boards, extension councils, or college trustees is not beneficial. As its members are selected and invited to join, three functions of the Advisory Board should be kept in mind:

a) Plan courses and other activities that will be responsive to the interests and needs of those to be served;

b) Maintain public relations, both formal and informal (well-chosen board members will often be able to access groups and organizations critical to the project's success); and

c) Obtain funding from whatever local, regional, and other sources can be identified.

3. Course and Project Ideas. An interest notice listing 50-70 course possibilities is disseminated, and people are asked to indicate what

topics they would like to study and/or lead. These notices can be distributed in stores, banks, churches, libraries, public buildings, clubs, and organizations, and they must announce a specific time by which returns should be in. Also, boxes and addresses for easy return of responses are necessary.

4. The First Brochure. After completed notices are returned, the Advisory Board (and other interested people) can match interests and potential leaders. Representatives visit the leaders to see if they will teach. A brief course description and title and a meeting place and time are determined for a brochure. The brochure can be fancy or simple, but the major communication about the program and its presentation must be effective.

5. Distribution of Brochures. Brochures may be distributed through stores, churches, libraries, and other public places. Concurrent arrangements should be made for press and radio publicity releases and stories.

6. Registration. A registration should be held about 10-14 days after brochures have been distributed. This provides an opportunity for interested participants to meet, for transmission of ideas for future projects, for gathering enrollment data for future presentations, and for providing information to course leaders. Registration should be in locations easily accessible by participants and may be accomplished by mail or telephone.

7. Leader Workshop. A workshop for leaders should be held after registration and before courses begin. It serves to provide various methods of leading a course to maximize learner-centeredness, to allow leaders to meet each other, to ask questions, to exchange information and to help develop support networks, and to give leaders course enrollment information.

After this leader workshop, programs begin and the project is under way. Depending on the number of staff (either paid or volunteer), there are four points that merit ongoing attention and action:

1. Everyone involved in the program must be kept informed of what is happening and what progress is being made.

2. Project timetables with dates for future brochures, presentations, funding deadlines, etc. must be maintained.

3. Opportunities for collaboration with other projects and development of potential projects that may emerge through course interactions (food co-ops, youth centers, community development efforts, and crisis intervention centers are among a long list of possibilities) must be followed up.

4. Records and data for reporting, research, future planning, and funding activities must be kept.

For the person actually charged with carrying out these programs, a small personal checklist for survival and success includes patience, a large sense of humor, practical and some theoretical knowledge about adult education and community organization, a sensitivity to small town and rural people, commitment, and the ability to recognize and utilize resources.

Beneficiaries of the Model

Should the rural free university model be integrated into the operations of the traditional institutional providers of nonformal adult education, the major beneficiaries will be thousands of adults living in rural America and the institutions themselves. Two comments from respondents in the Kansas study (Killacky, 1983) make the point eloquently with respect to participants:

From my point of view one of the most important things this program has done is in the area of community service. It is constantly looked upon as something positive which citizens can do other than church or pay entertainment. It could be the thing that will keep knowledge alive in certain areas. For example, it has been a bulwark of increased interest in homesteaders and who and what they really were in this area. It brings together people who may not have known each other, and it does promote a sense of community.

I learned that teaching was an area I like and the excitement of getting people over the panic of "I can't even draw a straight line." "That's O.K.," I'd say. "How many pictures have you seen that have straight lines. So you needn't worry." This program has really changed my life dramatically. Before I never would have tried. As a result the high school teacher asked me to come and help and this involved me with new students. From there I've gone back to college after twenty years to finish my Fine Arts degree.

For the institutional providers there are a number of benefits from the rural free university model:

1. They will reach new audiences in a cost-efficient manner.
2. They will facilitate the development of new community initiatives which will bring greater awareness of and responsiveness to the institutional sponsors and their programs.

3. They will provide more political support at the grassroots level for these institutions. For example, the Kansas passage of the Community Resource Act may be credited almost entirely to statewide support for UFM and the local programs. This political issue is critical for the continuing effectiveness of all the institutions in question.

4. They will provide the institutions, through their vast numbers and varying locations, with the opportunity to give unparalleled leadership in alerting and educating rural America to what Bowen (1981) cited as the four great problems of our times: the threat of nuclear destruction, human relationships, ignorance and illiteracy, and youth problems.

5. They will offer a focus to all of these institutions as they seek to develop that part of their mission which will respond to noncredit learning needs of their clientele.

6. They will raise the possibility of more collaboration and interagency cooperation among these three institutions and others.

7. They will move all of these institutions much closer than is presently the case toward meeting the criteria for effective nonformal adult education: active user engagement, pluralism, and affirmation of rural values and culture.

8. They will facilitate greater institutional response to Secretary Bell's call for greater attention to the learning needs of rural adults.

FINAL COMMENTS

While these suggestions may be viewed as useful, stimulating, and perhaps exciting at the local level, it seems critical that they not be presented as simply another project which ought to be implemented. The majority of county agents, rural public librarians, or community service coordinators will inevitably throw up their hands and protest that they are already overworked and underbudgeted.

If these changes are to take place and be widely implemented throughout each of these institutions, then the start must be made at the top. This can be accomplished by ensuring that the rural free university model is incorporated in policy statements, mission directives, and program development initiatives. From the leadership in all of these institutions, typical responses might be "Nice, but we can't afford it," "This is not part of our mission," or similarly weak and nonsupportive gestures. Some outright skeptics may say, "It will never work"; others may say that such "Flimsy courses should not be at public expense." If such skeptics had their way with this and other ideas, then many of the useful contributions to American education would never have come to light. The rural free university model of learning is an idea whose time has come. Experience suggests that, with the serious commitment of a small staff and with the ability to organize and to awaken in women and men their unlimited potential as teachers and learners, communities can be drawn together, lives can be positively changed, and a framework for social change can be established. Then the Cooperative Extension Service (CES), the community colleges, and the public libraries will have taken giant steps in responding to a major need in this nation while at the same time adding greatly to their own credibility.

Finally, the rural free university model is consistent with the thinking and philosophies espoused by two early figures whose influence was great in

shaping much of American adult education. Liberty Hyde Bailey wrote in 1911, "The materials and agencies that are part of the furniture of the planet, are to be utilized by each generation carefully, and with regard to the welfare of those to follow us" (p. 178). Seaman Knapp, the acknowledged founder of the famed extension demonstration method, might have been proposing the adaptation of the rural free university model in an 1894 address to extension workers in Mississippi when he said:

Now let us have an education of the masses for the masses. Your mission is to solve the problems of poverty, to increase the measure of happiness, to add to the universal love of the country, the universal knowledge and comfort, and to harness the forces of all learning to be useful and needful in human society. (p. 38)

The rural free university model holds the potential for responding to these two timeless charges in a manner which would please both Knapp and Bailey.

NOTES

1. The author wishes to thank independent reviewers, Susan Imel and Leonard O'Hara, whose comments on earlier drafts were insightful and very helpful. Walt McIntire, editor of Research in Rural Education and my colleague at UMO, graciously took time to read the final draft, and his red pencil did wonders for my run-on sentences. Betty Rose D. Rios, Associate Director of ERIC/CRESS, has been sterling in her supportive comments, criticisms, and suggestions for getting unstuck.

2. These observations are, of necessity, somewhat global. There are regional and local differences in the manner in which each of these institutions operates. Regrettably, there is little literature on local approaches in rural areas. This section is based on a detailed review of literature on the three institutions written for the author's dissertation (Killacky, 1983).

3. Two unique aspects of this legislation were the provision of technical assistance to groups (especially in small rural places) for preparing proposals and to communities for getting their projects into operation. This process has been directed by Beverly Wilhelm, University for Man, 1221 Thurston, Manhattan, KS 66502, who will be glad to respond to further inquiries.

4. A list of course titles drawn randomly from brochures of these local projects includes: You and the Law; The Man Behind the Mustache (Hitler); Energy Alternatives for the 80's; Rural Firefighting; Family Communication; The Death of the Small Farmer; Do It Yourself Meatcutting; You and Your Child: How is it Going; Sign Language; Kansans on Kansas: An Inquiry into Values; Fair Fighting; Women in the American Revolution; That Church Down the Street; Flowers for

Fun; Assertiveness Workshop; No Till Farming; Genealogy for Beginners; Nutritionally Good Snacks for Kids; Sing and Celebrate.

5. This study was carried out by the author during the 1981 academic year with support from the Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station. Six of the rural communities were selected; extensive interviews were conducted in each with participants, course leaders, and project board members. Detailed results of the study are in Killacky (1983, 1984).

6. While these steps are relatively simple, their treatment here is, of necessity, very brief. More detailed information may be had in the Rural Free University Manual, available from University for Man, 1221 Thurston, Manhattan, KS 66502. The steps, presented here in slightly modified form, were first published in Killacky (1978).

7. The issue of funding should not be a deterrent. As noted, the average annual budget in rural Kansas is \$2,500. To the author's knowledge, no program has failed to start solely due to lack of funding. Too often, however, this question gets asked in the first breath of the project and can tend to bog down the process. It is much more effective to get people excited about the potential of the program in terms of community resources and learning; within that framework the issue of funding is not seen as such a negative one.

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For the next seven years, he directed the outreach program of the University for Man at Kansas State University and was primarily responsible for the conceptualization, design, and implementation of the rural free university model of adult education.

In 1980 he entered the doctoral program at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education and spent the next couple of years reflecting upon and writing about the rural free university model and how it might be incorporated by other groups and organizations.

After graduation in June, 1983, he became director of Upward Bound and Talent Search programs at the University of Maine at Orono. He is also on the graduate faculty there and teaches adult education courses in the College of Education.

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